

Local rock hound makes jewelry from locally sourced stones

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IVN Contributing Writer

Illinois Valley Stones, a jewelry business featuring locally sourced semi-precious gems, got its start four years ago when Dan Lauderdale, longtime resident of the Illinois Valley, became interested in polishing nice looking rocks that he had found on his frequent off trail hiking adventures while looking for gold. Although it took time and no shortage of effort for Lauderdale to hone his self-taught lapidary and metalworking skills, he eventually started selling his work to fund the hobby. Though Lauderdale wants to expand the variety of local gemstones in his jewelry, he is currently working with pieces of Rhodonite, a pink and black manganese inosilicate widely renowned for its beauty, and certain types of serpentine family rock that resemble Happy Camp Jade.

"I enjoy being out in the woods because I don't hunt and I don't fish and it gives me a chance to get out and get some

exercise," Lauderdale said, referring to his rock hounding adventures. His most recent expeditions have primarily been in the pursuit of Chrysocolla, a bright blue rock which resembles the more famous turquoise and is a minor copper ore. About 40 years ago, a friend of his found a location and gathered up a few specimens but when he returned to the site later he found that someone had staked a mining claim. Taking it out by the truckload, the miners likely processed the rock for copper or perhaps even gold. Knowing that it's out there, Lauderdale will continue his search in the rugged back country of Southern Oregon.

Although exploring undeveloped areas presents a certain degree of hazard, Lauderdale is most concerned about leaving his car unattended because of the risk of theft, break-ins or just plain vandalism. "It's sad it's that way but it is," Lauderdale said, "It used to be that a thief was looked down on. It's almost like they pride

themselves in being a good thief." Grasping for a small sense of security, he's made it a habit to unplug certain wires under the hood of his car to make it harder for a thief to force start it.

Lauderdale grew up in Azalea and, an explorer and rock hound even then, would frequently take one of his father's hammers and go split interesting looking rocks open to see what was inside. An old miner who lived in his neighborhood supported him by using his rock saw to cut open more promising specimens. "He was kind of like a grandpa to us kids," Lauderdale said, adding that the man had a vast collection of rocks scattered throughout his house.

After moving away from Azalea and living in Grants Pass for several years, Lauderdale got married in 1979 and moved to the Illinois Valley in the pursuit of a less crowded place to live. For the next 33 years, he worked at Rough and Ready Mill.

Although Lauderdale has run a booth for the last three years at the Lions Club Labor Day Festival in Cave Junction and also sells his products up by the caves

and the local visitor center, he's looking into starting up an Etsy account to take his business to the global market.



Chrysocolla

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